

#SpottedAtMidpen

FLORA AND FAUNA GUIDE



MIDPENINSULA REGIONAL
OPEN SPACE DISTRICT



Hey nature lovers! Help us celebrate our 50th anniversary of preserving & protecting our region's open space. Spot something interesting, post it on Instagram, Facebook, or Twitter, tag it with #SpottedAtMidpen, and you could win a commemorative gift - plus naturalist bragging rights, of course.

The **#SpottedAtMidpen Flora and Fauna Guide** is your key to discovering the amazing plants and animals that can be spotted within your open space preserves.

Recreate Responsibly

Keeping ecosystems healthy requires us all to do our part. When visiting a preserve, please stay on designated trails, maintain distance from animals you may encounter and take only photos out of the preserve.



@notanist, iNaturalist



Karl Gohl

PACIFIC MADRONE (*Arbutus menziesii*)

Best Time to Find: Year-round. Flowering from March – May. Fruiting from October – January.

Preserves: [Bear Creek Redwoods](#), [Long Ridge](#), [Los Trancos](#)

A broad-leafed, evergreen tree with thin, orangey-red bark. In the spring, the tree bears small sprays of bell-like flowers, and in the autumn large clusters of red berries (sometimes called bearberries).

Fun Fact: The exposed wood sometimes feels cool to the touch, which has earned the madrone the nickname “refrigerator tree.”



@kathleenconnor, iNaturalist



Brian Washburn

CALIFORNIA BUCKEYE (*Aesculus californica*)

Best Time to Find: Year-round. Flowering from April – June. Dormant from July – October.

Preserves: [La Honda Creek](#), [Monte Bello](#), [Sierra Azul](#), [Windy Hill](#)

A small tree with pale silver bark and many branching stems. Leaves are dark green with five leaflets that have finely toothed edges. In spring, buckeyes display large number of white, sweetly scented flower clusters. Buckeye fruits are large, orangey-brown and resemble chestnuts. In the summer, California buckeyes go dormant and drop all their leaves.



@CAJC: in the PWN, iNaturalist



@mjrissenhoover, iNaturalist

THIMBLEBERRY (*Rubus parviflorus*)

Best Time to Find: March – November. Flowering from May – July. Fruiting from Late June – September.

Preserves: [Bear Creek Redwoods](#), [Coal Creek](#), [Purissima Creek Redwoods](#), [Thornewood](#)

Upright, two-to-seven-foot-tall shrubs that grow in moist soils. Their leaves are fuzzy, have five points and somewhat resemble maple leaves. The five-petaled flowers are white with a yellow center. Berries are bright red with a hollow center. Thimbleberries are often one of the first plants to re-establish after fires in redwood forests.



@tgosliner, iNaturalist



@lglevanik, iNaturalist

TANOAK (*Notholithocarpus densiflorus*)

Best Time to Find: Year-round.

Preserves: [Bear Creek Redwoods](#), [El Corte de Madera Creek](#), [Saratoga Gap](#)

These trees have serrated, dark-green, leathery leaves that are often covered in a layer of orange-brown fuzz when young. Tanoak acorns have harder shells than oak acorns. The top of the acorn is covered in rough spines.



@mykelsage, iNaturalist

CALIFORNIA CUDWEED (*Pseudognaphalium californicum*)

Best Time to Find: Year-round. Flowers May – August.

Preserves: [Los Trancos](#), [Picchetti Ranch](#), [St. Joseph's Hill](#)

Most notable for its whitish flowers, which bloom in clusters of up to 12. Leaves are narrow with wavy edges, and often smell like maple syrup and/or cumin.

Fun Fact: The white “petals” are actually phyllaries (leaf-like structures). In late summer, these papery phyllaries dry out and remain on the stem long after the flowers have died, which is why this plant is also known as California everlasting.



@leptonia, iNaturalist

SKY LUPINE (*Lupinus nanus*)

Best Time to Find: Late February – May.

Preserves: [Fremont Older](#), [La Honda Creek](#), [Russian Ridge](#), [St. Joseph's Hill](#)

These flowers, which grow in dense spikes, are a rich blue with white or yellowish spots. They are found in open, scrubby habitats, often growing in conjunction with other flower species like California poppies (*Eschscholzia californica*) or bicolored lupines (*Lupinus bicolor*).



@nelruzam, iNaturalist

TREE LUNGWORT (*Lobaria pulmonaria*)

Best Time to Find: November – April.

Preserves: [El Corte de Madera Creek](#), [Long Ridge](#), [Skyline Ridge](#)

A large, flat lichen that lives on the bark of trees. It is often found on bark of hardwood trees like oaks and madrones, and less commonly on conifers like redwood or pine. It is very sensitive to air and water pollution and is a very good indicator of clean air and clean rain.



David Y. Porter

TURKEY TAIL FUNGUS (*Trametes versicolor*)

Best Time to Find: Year-round. New fungi more common October – February.

Preserves: [Coal Creek](#), [Long Ridge](#), [Pulgas Ridge](#), [Thornewood](#)

Named for its fan-like shape and its beautiful colors, this eye-catching fungus can be found throughout the Bay Area. It grows in shelf or rosette shapes on fallen hardwood logs where it breaks down the rotting wood for nutrients.



Kate Auerbach

ACMON BLUE (*Icaricia acmon*)

Best Time to Find: March – October.

Preserves: [Pulgas Ridge](#), [Russian Ridge](#), [Sierra Azul](#)

The top sides of this butterfly's wings are blue with dark edges in males and brown in females. The underside is white with black with a red-orange band on its back wing in both sexes.

Fun Fact: Acmon blue butterfly larvae have a mutually beneficial relationship with certain ants, who protect the larvae in exchange for honeydew that the larvae produce.



Jack Lucas

CALIFORNIA BANANA SLUG (*Ariolimax californicus*)

Best Time to Find: October – April. Year-round near water sources.

Preserves: [El Corte de Madera Creek](#), [Purissima Creek Redwoods](#), [Thornewood](#)

Bright yellow slugs that can grow up to 10 inches long. They have thick, sticky slime that keeps them moist, and helps them glide across the forest floor. In the summer they bury themselves under the leaf litter and cover themselves in a thick layer of slime.

Fun Fact: Banana slugs can use their slime to communicate with one another through pheromones – chemical messengers that let other slugs know how the slug who left the trail is doing.



Chip Curry

CALIFORNIA NEWTS (*Taricha torosa*)

Best Time to Find: November – May. Especially common after rain.

Preserves: [Bear Creek Redwoods](#), [Monte Bello](#), [Picchetti Ranch](#)

These amphibians have rough brown skin on their top sides, and orange skin on their undersides. Adult newts are easiest to spot as they migrate to their aquatic breeding grounds from November – February. They look almost exactly like rough-skinned newts, which are also abundant in the Bay Area. Both species contain an extremely potent toxin in their skins!



Renee Fitzsimons

PACIFIC GOPHER SNAKE (*Pituophis catenifer catenifer*)

Best Time to Find: May – September.

Preserves: [El Sereno](#), [La Honda Creek](#), [Skyline Ridge](#)

These reptiles range from 3-7 feet long and can be spotted in a wide variety of habitats. With tan bodies that feature dark blotches, these snakes are often mistaken for rattlesnakes, but are non-venomous.

Fun Fact: Rolo, our gopher snake reptile ambassador, lives at the Daniels Nature Center in Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve!



Caroline Lambert

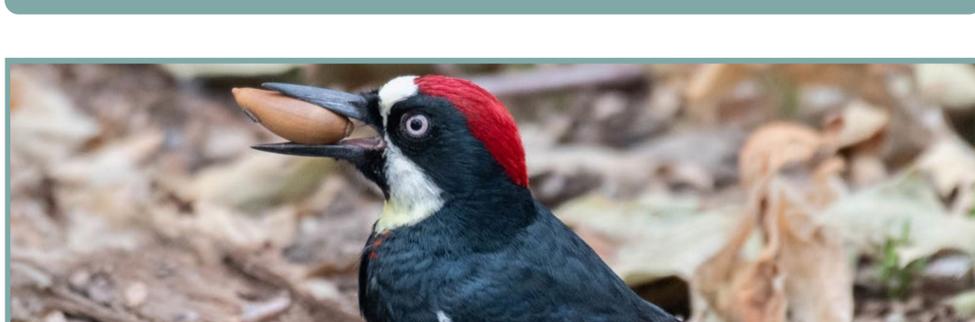
SPOTTED TOWHEE (*Pipilo maculatus*)

Best Time to Find: Year-round.

Preserves: [El Sereno](#), [Fremont Older](#), [Picchetti Ranch](#), [St. Joseph's Hill](#)

Large sparrows with dark, fan-shaped tails, red sides, white bellies and black backs with white spots. They also have bright red eyes. They are often found in chaparral habitats.

Fun Fact: Spotted towhees are often heard before they are seen. [Click here](#) to hear a spotted towhee's calls.



@ryanandrews, iNaturalist

ACORN WOODPECKER (*Melanerpes formicivorus*)

Best Time to Find: Year-round.

Preserves: [Los Trancos](#), [Rancho San Antonio](#), [Windy Hill](#)

Mostly black on their top sides with a red cap, creamy white face, and black patch around the bill. These woodpeckers live in large family groups.

Fun Fact: Acorn woodpeckers store acorns in their "granary" – a pantry made up of many holes drilled into a dead tree. You can often find them near their granary trees.



Karl Gohl

COLUMBIAN BLACK-TAILED DEER (*Odocoileus hemionus columbianus*)

Best Time to Find: Year-round.

Preserves: [Los Trancos](#), [Monte Bello](#), [Windy Hill](#)

The top side of the tail is almost entirely black. The tails of other sub-species of mule deer all have areas of white in them.

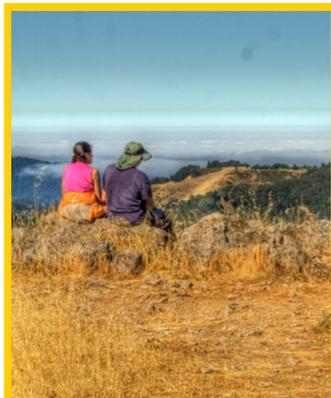
Fun Fact: Columbian black-tailed deer can eat western poison oak, even though it contains irritating chemicals.



POINTS OF INTEREST



Karl Gohl



Jayasimha Nuggehalli



Andy Xiang

ANNIVERSARY TRAIL *Windy Hill*

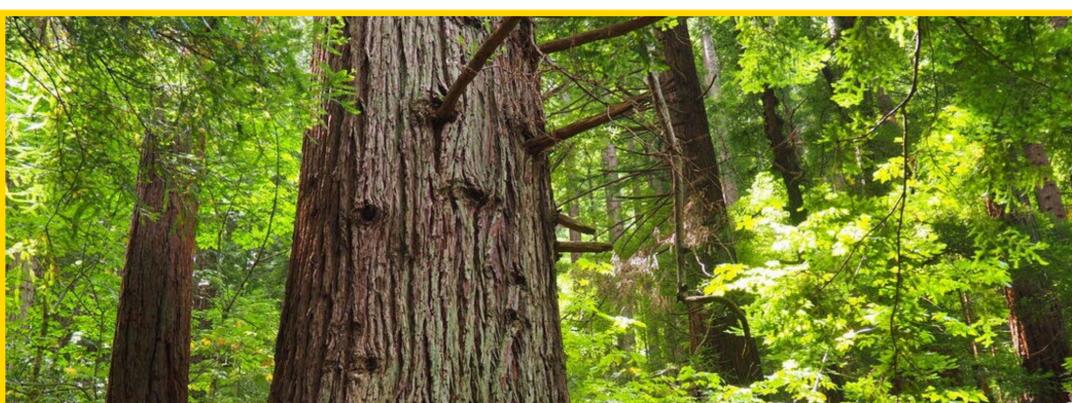
During the short but steep walk up to the Windy Hill summit, you will delight in 360-degree views of the San Francisco Bay, the Santa Cruz Mountains and the Pacific Ocean! This trail is easily accessed from the Spring Ridge parking area along Skyline Boulevard.

BLACK MOUNTAIN *Monte Bello*

For the adventurous hiker, the long walk up to this summit of Monte Bello Ridge is unforgettable. At the top you will be treated to astounding views of Butano Ridge, the Pacific Ocean, Diablo Range and the Santa Clara Valley. You can also hike to the summit from Rancho San Antonio Preserve.

MOUNT UMUNHUM *Sierra Azul*

At 3,486 feet, this is one of the highest peaks in the Santa Cruz Mountains. From the peak, views stretch from the Pacific Ocean to the Sierra Nevada range. Because you can drive right up to the summit and park, it's a must-see for people of all ages and abilities.



Claire Dawkins

COASTAL REDWOODS (*Sequoia sempervirens*)

Preserves: [Bear Creek Redwoods](#), [El Corte de Madera Creek](#), [Purisima Creek Redwoods](#)

Some of the most iconic trees in the world. There are very few old-growth redwoods left in the Bay Area due to heavy logging in the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Spot some awe-inspiring, old-growth redwoods, and see how the forest has grown and recovered since the logging era at the above preserves.

Fun Fact: With a little imagination and a good eye, you can spot telltale signs of the region's logging history. You might notice a flattened pad where a mill or cabin once stood, notches in stumps from springboards, or the rusted remains of heavy equipment.



Sandra Martin

TAFONI MONOLITH

Preserves: [El Corte de Madera Creek](#)

From the Tafoni Trail, you can see unique sandstone formations called tafoni. These unique indentations are formed in sandstone by just the right combination of weather and atmospheric conditions. This geologic formation is easily recognized due to its honeycomb or sponge-like texture.



Mike Kahn

RAVENSWOOD BOARDWALK AND SHOREBIRDS

Best time to find: Migrating shorebirds can be seen in November, December and April.

Preserves: [Ravenswood](#), shorebirds can also be spotted at [Stevens Creek Nature Study Area](#)

From a raised boardwalk over the tidal salt marsh, you can view shorebirds as they migrate by the thousands along the Pacific Flyway in late fall and early spring. The boardwalk connects over 80 miles of contiguous San Francisco Bay Trail, a beautiful shoreline bicycle and pedestrian path.



David Tharp

DAVID C. DANIELS NATURE CENTER AND ALPINE POND

Preserves: [Skyline Ridge](#), open on Saturdays and Sundays from mid-April to mid-November.

Overlooking Alpine Pond at Skyline Ridge Open Space Preserve, the David C. Daniels Nature Center features imaginative displays that both children and adults can enjoy. A half-mile trail, accessible to all abilities, loops around the pond, where you may see various waterfowl or a western pond turtle.

Visit openspace.org to learn more about what we do and how you can get involved, whether by participating in public meetings, volunteering at a preserve or attending a docent naturalist-led hike or education program.

INTRO PAGE PHOTOGRAPHER CREDITS (L-R)

Top Left - Acorn Woodpecker: *Carol Ann Krug Graves*

Top Right - David C. Daniels Nature Center and Alpine Pond: *Karl Gohl*

Center - Sky Lupine: *Jason Cantley*

Bottom Left - Ravenswood Boardwalk and Shorebirds: *Mike Kahn*

Bottom Right - Columbian Black-Tailed Deer: *Karl Gohl*

